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UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Letter dated 1 July 1991 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i.
of the Permanent Mission of China to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon the instruction of my Government, I have the honour to forward to you a copy of the Beijing Ministerial Declaration on Environment and Development adopted by the Ministers from 41 developing countries at the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development on 19 June 1991 in Beijing (see annex).

I would be grateful if you could arrange for this letter and the attached Declaration to be issued as an official document of the General Assembly under item 79 of the preliminary list, and of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in 1992.

(Signed) JIN Yongjian
Acting Permanent Representative
of the People's Republic of China
to the United Nations

* A/46/50.

Annex

BEIJING MINISTERIAL DECLARATION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

(Adopted on 19 June 1991)

We, the Ministers from forty-one developing countries,* met in Beijing, at the invitation of the Government of the People's Republic of China, from 18 to 19 June 1991, at the Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, and having discussed in depth the challenges faced by the international community in establishing norms of cooperation for the enhancement of environment and development, particularly the implications for the developing countries, declare as follows:

1. We are deeply concerned about the accelerating degradation of the global environment. This is largely on account of unsustainable development models and life styles. As a result, the basic elements indispensable for human life - land, water and atmosphere, - are gravely threatened. The more serious and widespread environmental problems are air pollution, climate change, ozone layer depletion, drying up of fresh water resources, pollution of rivers, lakes and the marine environment including the coastal zones, marine and coastal resources deterioration, floods and droughts, soil loss, land degradation, desertification, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, acid rain, proliferation and mismanagement of toxic products, illegal traffic of toxic and dangerous products and wastes, growth of urban agglomeration, deterioration of living and working conditions in urban and rural areas, especially of sanitation, resulting in epidemics, and other such problems. Furthermore, poverty in the developing countries is becoming aggravated, hampering the efforts to meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of their people and exerting greater pressures on the environment.

2. We affirm that environmental protection and sustainable development is a matter of common concern to humankind, which requires effective actions by the international community and provides an opportunity for global cooperation. Against this background and out of a strong concern for the present and future generations, we hereby reaffirm our solemn commitment to participating actively, on the basis of differentiated responsibilities and to the best of our ability, in the global efforts for environmental protection and sustainable development, keeping in view the general principles and broad approach set out below.

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* For the list of developing countries attending the Conference, see the appendix.

I. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

3. Changes in the environment are closely related to economic and social activities. Environmental problems must not be viewed in isolation, and need to be addressed together with the process of development, by integrating environmental concerns with the imperatives of economic growth and development. In this connection, the right to development of the developing countries must be fully recognized, and the adoption of measures for the protection of the global environment should support their economic growth and development. In particular, the international community must actively support the efforts of developing countries to strengthen their institutional and technical capacities.

4. The special situation and needs of the developing countries should be fully taken into account. Each country must be enabled to determine the pace of transition, based on the adaptive capacity of its economic, social and cultural ethos and capabilities. The environmental problems of developing countries arise from the conditions of poverty. The development process initiated by these countries utilizing the old polluting technologies provided by the developed countries also contributes to the degradation of the environment, which in turn, undermines the development process itself. This adversely affects not only the developing countries but also the entire world. Sustainable development and steady economic growth constitute a way to break this cycle of poverty and environmental degradation and to strengthen the capabilities of the developing countries for environmental protection. The least developed countries, disaster-prone developing countries as well as island and low-lying developing countries should be given special attention by the world community.

5. The inequities in current international economic relations confronting the developing countries, especially with regard to debt, financing, trade and transfer of technology, have led to serious consequences for them, including the reverse flow of financial resources, brain drain and backwardness in their scientific and technological capabilities. The economic development of the developing countries has thus been constrained and their capability to participate effectively in global environmental efforts undermined. It is therefore imperative to establish a new and equitable international economic order conducive to the sustained and sustainable development of all countries, particularly the developing countries, thereby creating the conditions necessary for global cooperation to protect the environment. Countries should be able to determine their own environment and development policies, without any barriers or discrimination on trade against them.

6. International cooperation in the field of environmental protection should be based on the principle of equality among sovereign States. The developing countries have the sovereign right to use their own natural resources in keeping with their developmental and environmental objectives and priorities. Furthermore environmental considerations should not be used as an excuse for interference in the internal affairs of the developing countries, nor should

these be used to introduce any forms of conditionality in aid or development financing, or to impose trade barriers affecting the export and development efforts of the developing countries.

7. While the protection of the environment is in the common interests of the international community, the developed countries bear the main responsibility for the degradation of the global environment. Ever since the Industrial Revolution, the developed countries have over-exploited the world's natural resources through unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, causing damage to the global environment, to the detriment of the developing countries.

8. The developed countries, in view of their main responsibility for environmental degradation and their greater financial and technological capabilities, must take the lead in eliminating the damage to the environment as well as in assisting the developing countries to deal with the problems facing them.

9. The developing countries need adequate, new and additional financial resources to be able to address effectively the environmental and developmental problems confronting them. There should be preferential and non-commercial transfer of environmentally sound technologies to the developing countries.

10. On their part, the developing countries will contribute to the process of environmental protection and enhancement by, inter alia, stepping up technical cooperation and transfer of technology among themselves.

II. SECTORAL ISSUES

11. Land degradation, desertification, floods and droughts, worsening quality and supply of fresh water resources, soil loss, marine and coastal resources deterioration, deforestation and vegetation degradation are among the serious environmental problems confronting the developing countries. These constitute a major part of the problem of global environmental degradation, to which priority should be accorded. These problems have been discussed in international fora, and some plans of action have been proposed or approved. However, no effective actions have been taken so far by the international community towards their implementation. We urge the international community to immediately initiate actions in this regard, particularly by establishing an international funding mechanism for this purpose.

12. We are gravely concerned with the continuous increase in the greenhouse gases leading to climate change and its likely implications for the global ecological system, especially the threat that they pose to the developing countries, and to the island and low-lying developing countries in particular. Responsibility for the emission of greenhouse gases should be viewed both in historical and cumulative terms, and in terms of current emissions. On the basis of the principle of equity, those developed countries

which have contaminated more must contribute more. Developed countries should therefore commit themselves to adopting measures to halt human-induced climate change and to setting up mechanisms to guarantee the environmental security and development of the developing countries, including the transfer to the developing countries, on preferential and non-commercial terms, of technologies for this purpose.

13. The framework convention on climate change currently being negotiated should clearly recognize that it is the developed countries which are mainly responsible for excessive emissions of greenhouse gases, historically and currently, and it is these developed countries which must take immediate action to stabilize and reduce such emissions. Developing countries cannot be expected to accept any obligations in the near future. However, they should be encouraged through technical and financial cooperation to undertake measures within their plans, priorities and programmes which contribute both to their economic development and to the efforts to tackle the problem of climate change, without prejudicing their growing energy needs. The framework convention must include, inter alia, firm commitments by developed countries towards the transfer of technology to developing countries, the establishment of a separate funding mechanism, and the development of the economically viable new and renewable energy sources as well as sustainable agricultural practices, which constitutes an important step to deal with the major cause of climate change. In addition, the developing countries must be provided with the full scientific, technical and financial cooperation necessary to cope with the adverse impacts of climate change.

14. We further agree that the purpose and principles of the Vienna Convention on the Protection of the Ozone Layer and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, as amended in June 1990, are positive in nature. The implementation by the developing countries of the obligations under the amended Protocol is subject to the effective implementation by the States parties to the Protocol of the arrangements for the provision of financial resources and transfer of technology to the developing countries. We urge the developed countries to commit themselves to the long-term arrangements for providing adequate financial resources and the expeditious transfer of technology as required of them under the Vienna Convention and the Montreal Protocol, as amended in June 1990.

15. We are concerned at the accelerating loss of biodiversity. Most living organisms and their habitats in the world belong to the developing countries and they have borne the cost of conserving them over the ages. Such efforts should be recognized and supported by the international community and in international conventions and subsequent protocols. Each State has sovereignty over its biological resources, thus conservation measures should be compatible with its national plans and priorities. The international legal instrument on biodiversity now being negotiated must clearly recognize, inter alia, the linkage between access to genetic material and transfer of biotechnology, research development in the country of origin, sharing of the fruits of scientific research and the commercial profits. Issues of intellectual property rights must be satisfactorily resolved so that they do

not become an obstacle to the transfer of technology, including biotechnology. Furthermore, the international legal instrument must recognize and reward the innovative work done by rural population, largely in developing countries, in protecting and utilizing biodiversity.

16. We note that though control and management of hazardous wastes and toxic substances require international cooperation, the Basel Convention adopted two years ago has not entered into force. We therefore urge those States which have not ratified the Convention to consider the possibility of becoming parties to it. We urge all States to take steps to provide for a liability and compensation regime; mechanisms for transfer of low-waste technologies to the developing countries; development of capabilities for identification, analysis and disposal of wastes and mechanisms for adopting a world-wide ban on export of hazardous wastes to developing countries which do not have such capabilities. Likewise, we are concerned with the continuous illegal traffic of toxic and dangerous products and wastes, particularly from developed to developing countries. We urge the developed countries to take appropriate measures to halt such traffic.

17. Multilateral measures to protect forests and promote their sustainable management, including the proposal for a global consensus on forestry, should be aimed at enhancing the economic, social and environmental potentials of forests. Management plans should integrate living resource conservation and development priorities and goals, taking into account the needs of the local communities, including their habitats. In this respect, efforts, including specific projects of developing countries to promote the utilization of the tropical forests on a sustainable basis, should be recognized and supported. It should take the form of financial and technical assistance, as well as ensuring better market access for higher value-added timber products. It is equally important to ensure financial cooperation by the world community for forest conservation and development. Towards this end, the international community should, among other things, make efforts towards the greening of the world and countries which had in the past so destroyed their extensive forests should increase their forest cover through reforestation and afforestation programmes.

18. We are deeply concerned about the spread of desertification process and continuity of prolonged drought cycles, which have been recognized by the international community as major environmental problems. Hence there is an urgent need to accord high priority to these problems and to take all necessary measures including the provision of appropriate financial, scientific and technical resources in order to stop and reverse the process of desertification and drought, with the aim of contributing to the preservation of the global ecological balance.

19. The marine and coastal resources deterioration resulting from irrational exploitation and pollution, mostly by developed countries, constitutes a serious development constraint for those countries that depend on them. It is necessary to enlarge cooperation on the protection and use of regional seas and to improve their rational utilization based on better knowledge and

information. Discharge of toxic and nuclear wastes at seas and oceans must be banned, and that of other wastes should be strictly regulated.

20. In the densely populated cities of developing countries, insufficiency of resources causes inefficiency of the basic public services, high marginality, and degradation of the urban environment. Urban planning, including mechanisms for financing sustainable development, must contribute to enhancing the quality of life in the urban and rural settlements. In this context, the new mechanisms for financing sustainable development should give priority to these problems.

III. CROSS-SECTORAL ISSUES

21. The key to the success of the global efforts for the protection of the environment is the broadest possible participation of the international community; this depends to a large extent on whether substantial progress can be made on cross-sectoral issues, including in particular, the availability of adequate, new and additional financial resources and transfer of technology on preferential and non-commercial terms to the developing countries.

22. With regard to global environmental issues, every international legal instrument should include provisions for adequate, new and additional funds, which should lay down in explicit terms the commitments of the developed countries in this regard. A key factor is the adequacy of financial resources, which should be sufficient for the developing countries to cover the incremental costs involved in addressing the issues and in implementing their relevant commitments derived from international legal instruments. Contribution by the developed countries should be sufficient to cover the costs not only of prevention but also of mitigating the cumulative effects of past actions. Developing countries could also contribute, on a voluntary basis, to the funds.

23. In order to deal with the long-existing but now rapidly aggravating environmental problems of immediate concern to the developing countries, a special Green Fund should be established to provide adequate and additional financial assistance to them. This Fund should be used to address problems which are not covered by specific international agreements, such as water pollution, coastal pollution affecting mangrove forest, shortages and degradation of fresh water resources, deforestation, soil loss, land degradation and desertification. It should also cover the costs of the transfer of environmentally sound technologies and the costs of building up national capabilities for environmental protection and for scientific and technological research. This Fund should be managed on the basis of equitable representation from developing and developed countries, and should ensure easy access for developing countries.

24. We emphasize the important role of science and technology in protecting the global environment, and reaffirm that measures need to be taken to ensure the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to the developing countries

on preferential, most favourable, concessional and non-commercial terms. The transfer of these technologies to the developing countries should be regarded as a contribution to the common interests of humankind. The developed countries should promote the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries, through procedures and arrangements including incentives and disincentives to the private sector.

IV. THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

25. In accordance with the United Nations General Assembly resolution 44/228, we emphasize that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 should not only discuss the global environmental issues such as climate change and ozone layer depletion and the related response strategies. It should also be a forum to address other global issues confronting the developing countries, particularly those development issues related to environment. The relevant agreements reached at the Conference must provide guidance to international deliberations on trade, finance, technology and other similar issues. The interlinkages, where relevant, should be incorporated in each.

26. We believe that the proposed Earth Charter and agenda 21 resulting from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development should be compatible with the principles embodied in relevant resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly. Furthermore, they must reflect the outcomes of the conferences of developing countries with regard to the inter-relationship between environment and development, and the special situation and the needs of the developing countries. The agenda should be action-oriented to solve the environmental problems and meet the needs of the developing countries with the aim of integrating environmental concerns with development.

27. We also believe that poverty is at the root of the environmental problems of the developing world. The Conference could provide new strength and momentum to the proposed launching of a huge world programmme against poverty and its effects on world environment.

V. COORDINATION AND COOPERATION AMONG DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

28. We agree that the environment-related efforts at various international fora, particularly in the preparatory process for the 1992 Conference, will have direct and far-reaching implications for the developing countries. We emphasize that it is a pressing task for us developing countries to intensify consultations and coordination among ourselves in an effort to present our positions at international fora more effectively so as to safeguard better the interests of the developing countries as a whole.

29. We decide to strengthen further consultations and coordination among developing countries in the preparatory process for the 1992 Conference and at other international fora, along the lines of the New Delhi Conference in 1990 and the Beijing Conference.

30. We believe that measures should be taken to explore the ways and means and modalities for economic and technical cooperation among developing countries in the sphere of environment and development. In this regard, developing countries will also endeavour to set appropriate environmental goals for attaining better quality of life and environmental well-being, while at the same time identify and assess the financial and technological needs for achieving such goals.

31. We support the retaining and strengthening of the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme and all its programme activity centres in Nairobi, considering the success the Programme has achieved to date from this venue and the need to have it better equipped for carrying out its work.

32. We re-emphasize that we intend to participate fully in the global effort to protect the environment without hindering the development process and that this can be achieved if the right climate is created for global cooperation by a positive, constructive and practical response on the part of the developed countries, so that we can jointly promote the well-being of the present and future generations.

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APPENDIX

List of participating countries

Algeria
Argentina
Bangladesh
Brazil
Cameroon
Chile
China
Colombia
Côte d'Ivoire
Cuba
Egypt
Ethiopia
Fiji
Ghana
Guyana
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Jordan
Kenya
Malaysia
Mali
Mexico
Morocco
Nepal
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Singapore
Sudan
Thailand
Uganda
United Republic of Tanzania
Venezuela
Yugoslavia
Zaire
Zimbabwe